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Presentation 2

Over the past century(s), women roles have changed tremendously. Women have gained more power, such as the right to vote, higher positions in the workplace and society, overall. Also, there has been a shift in gender roles. For example, some women have become the breadwinners, while the husband takes care of the household, which was rare in the early 20th century. Throughout this paper I will discuss stories that were written during the Harlem Renaissance that addressed the following issues: gender, race, and coming of age. In each story, I believe the women felt trapped in her relationship and/ or society because of certain social circumstances.

Throughout Clade McKay’s poems “*The Harlem Shadows*” and “*The Harlem Dancer*,” McKay addresses the issue of youthfulness in the African American society during this time. The poem “*The Harlem Shadows”* is about a young African American girl prostitute roaming the low income areas of Harlem nights. “*The Harlem Dancer*” poem is about young prostitutes dancing in the club. McKay uses youthfulness to illustrate the loss of innocence these young girls faced. The fact that these girls used their sensuality and sexuality to make a living caused them to grow up quicker than expected, probably for their age.

In Jean Toomer’s stories, “Karintha,” “Becky,” and “Blood- Burning Moon,” Toomer approached the topics of age, gender, and race. *Karintha* is about a beautiful African American woman who is admired by men, both old and young. The constant attention of admiration causes her to mature quicker. She would have sexual encounters with men, since they give her money. For instance, the text stated “she played ‘home’ with a small boy who was not afraid to do her bidding” (Toomer 1). As time went on, Karintha is now a woman “that has been married many time,” (Toomer 2) with a child. Men still admire her, mainly younger men since the older know more about her. This text portrays the ideal of growing up too quick with the loss of innocence. Since she receives a lot of attention, Karintha in a sense uses that to her advantage to get what she wants. Being young and having sex with several men caused her to lose the innocence she once obtained.

*“Becky”and “Blood- Burning Moon”* by Toomer illustrate the issues of interracial relationships during the early 20th century. Both characters, Louisa and Becky, have relations with person(s) outside of their race. During this time, racism was still a major problem. Men and women of the same race were not allowed to have an open relationship with someone of a different race. If it were done, there were consequences for both parties. In the short story *Becky,* she was shunned out of town because she was a Caucasian woman with two African American sons. Both Caucasian and African American townspeople criticized her because she had an interracial relationship and end up pregnant twice. Instead of Becky telling the townspeople who the father was, she took responsibility of her actions.

Blood- Burning Moon is about Louisa, an African American girl who has two relationships, one with her boss Bob Stone (white male) and Tom Burwell (black male). Both Bob and Tom believe that they are Louisa man. After rumors start circulating around town that Louisa is messing around with both men. Both Tom and Bob get upset and try to address, but a fight breaks out where Bob and Tom end up dead. Tom kills Bob Stone and the townspeople kill Tom Burwell. Around this time, of an African American were to kill a Caucasian he or she will be killed by the people of the town.

In Becky and Blood Burning Moon, there were different outcomes and roles Becky and Louisa’s gender and race played. If it had not been for Becky’s actions of getting pregnant and not telling the townspeople who the father of her children were, the people would have probably showed her more respect and remorse, instead of making her an outcast. For example, the text stated “folks from the town took turns, unknown, of course, to each other, in bringing corn and meat and sweet potatoes” (Toomer 1). Vice versa, since Louisa is an African American woman during this time frame, the people had no remorse or respect for her. There is a social hierarchy. White men had high authority over everyone, and then white women, black men, and black women followed in place.

In conclusion, each story represents the entrapment and the struggles women faced during the early 20th century; from losing innocence at an early age to racism.